

DISPLAYS

FAQ

Q I'm concerned about sitting in front of a computer all day. How should I adjust my monitor to make it as comfortable to view as possible?

A An incorrectly positioned monitor can cause your neck and shoulders to hurt, as well as give you headaches and eyestrain. The screen should be at least an arm's length away, and more if it is 20" or bigger.

You should also make sure the monitor can tilt and is height adjustable. The top of the screen should be level with your eyes and slightly further away than the bottom of the screen. If the manufacturer hasn't made the stand height adjustable, you'll have to do this yourself with a stand or perhaps a few handy back issues of *Computer Shopper*.

Lynley Oram

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VIEWSONIC ViewDock VX1945wm

★★★★★

£244 inc VAT

ViewSonic's ViewDock VX1945wm takes its name from the iPod docking station located in its substantial base. This base also houses a memory card reader, subwoofer, four-port USB2 hub, audio-in/out connectors, headphone and microphone jacks. The glossy black surround and stand trim look fabulous, but quickly become dingy with smudged fingerprints. There is a cable tidy at the back of the fixed-height stand, but it feels flimsy and we weren't confident it would stand up to much use.

The iPod dock comes with clip-in adaptors that adjust the dock's size to suit your iPod. All models are supported except the Shuffle, which has no dock connector, and the new Nano. You can connect the Nano directly without an adaptor, but it's wobbly and doesn't look as elegant. Newer iPods come with an adaptor designed to fit Apple's Universal iPod Dock, but this didn't fit the ViewDock, which uses a different-sized adaptor. We're surprised, as Apple licenses the Universal iPod Dock to third-party manufacturers to prevent the problem we encountered.

As well as synchronising your iPod with your PC via the USB connection, the dock can be used to play audio from your iPod when your PC is turned off. Video and pictures, however, can be played only through iTunes, which seems a like a missed opportunity.

Sound quality for a monitor isn't too bad and could easily replace a cheap set of speakers. However, the subwoofer lacks bass and the 2.5W speakers are quiet. Even with every volume setting turned up full – there's a dedicated volume dial on the front of the stand – we strained to hear dialogue in films.



There are DVI and VGA connectors. We tested over both with near-identical results; however, it is best to use DVI if your PC has a digital connector. We were pleased to find ViewSonic bucking the trend by sending out both VGA and DVI cables with its monitor; most manufacturers include only a VGA cable.

The Windows desktop appeared crisp and well focused at the native resolution of 1,440x900. Contrast can be directly adjusted using the control buttons, but there is no dedicated control for brightness. This can only be changed from within the onscreen display. Illumination of the screen is even. Viewing angles are pretty good, with only a slight loss of brightness when viewed from the side. Our test images looked great, with detail in the darkest areas displayed clearly.

Colours weren't quite as vibrant or rich as on some other monitors we've seen, though.

The iPod dock isn't a good-enough reason to buy this monitor, but the USB2 hub and memory card reader make it more attractive, and it's good value if you want all these extras. If you're just after a high-quality monitor, HP's LP2065 (see 'Also consider...') is a better choice.

Lynley Oram

SUMMARY

- ✓ USB2 hub, memory card reader
- ✓ Excellent brightness and contrast
- ✗ Muted colours

19" WIDESCREEN LCD MONITOR
1,440x900 resolution, 700:1 contrast ratio, 5ms response time, D-sub, DVI, four-port USB2 hub, 8-in-1 card reader
PART CODE VX1945WM
SUPPLIER www.morecomputers.co.uk
DETAILS www.viewsoniceurope.com/uk

Also consider...

SAMSUNG 215TW

★★★★★
£361 inc VAT

Samsung's 215TW is a top-quality monitor that's perfectly suited to home and work use. Viewing angles are excellent and the picture quality cannot be faulted. It has a comprehensive range of connections, including S-video, composite, component, DVI and D-sub. There's a picture-in-picture option, too, so you can watch DVDs while you work.

21" LCD 1,680x1,050 resolution, 8ms response time, 1,000:1 contrast ratio, D-sub, DVI, S-video, composite and component inputs
PART CODE SAMQDPWASQ
SUPPLIER www.pixmania.com
DETAILS www.samsung.co.uk
✓ Excellent picture quality ✗ Pricy
FULL REVIEW Sep 2006



ACER AL1751

★★★★★
£149 inc VAT

Its reflective coating makes the AL1751 display dark, rich blacks and vibrant colours. It passed all our image tests easily and is one of the best-quality monitors we've reviewed. It has DVI and D-sub inputs, and copes well with both. With its 8ms response time, it's ideal for gamers, producing smooth fast-moving scenes with no ghosting. At this price, though, it's a great buy for anyone.

17" LCD 1,280x1,024 resolution, 8ms response time, 500:1 contrast ratio, stereo speakers, DVI and D-sub inputs
PART CODE ET.L4008.011
SUPPLIER www.acernotebooks.co.uk
DETAILS www.acer.co.uk
✓ Good picture ✗ Poor-quality speakers
FULL REVIEW Feb 2006



HP LP2065

★★★★★
£304 inc VAT

HP's LP2065 looks classy, with a thin silver bezel and minimalist design. The screen can pivot, there's a four-port USB2 hub built in and it has two DVI inputs. Whites are pure and bright, and high-contrast images are impeccably reproduced. The screen is a little more expensive than most, but it's a price worth paying to get the best image quality.

20" LCD 1,600x1,200 native resolution, 2x DVI inputs, four-port USB2 hub
PART CODE EF227AT
SUPPLIER www.pcwb.com
DETAILS www.hp.com/uk
✓ Good design, excellent brightness and contrast, handy USB2 hub
FULL REVIEW Aug 2006



Iiyama X486S-B1

★★★★★

£222 inc VAT



Iiyama's X486S-B1 is a tastefully designed display, with a neat matt black finish and the control buttons discreetly hidden on the side of the bezel. There are dedicated buttons for contrast and brightness, making it particularly easy to calibrate the picture. The stand is fixed with a screen elevation of just 90mm. Our FAQ opposite describes how having your screen at the wrong height can cause neck and back problems, so you'll probably want to buy a monitor stand.

Iiyama makes a great deal of the monitor's 2ms response time, pushing it at the gaming market. However, this figure is for grey-to-grey transitions, which are quicker on all monitors. Its black-to-white and white-to-black response time, the figure usually quoted for monitors, is still a respectable 5ms.

Playing games on this monitor, particularly fast-paced 3D action games, showed no ghosting or blurring. That said, we've done a comparison of monitors with response times from 25ms downwards and seen precious little difference between them.

The screen has a reflective coating, which makes colours look richer and blacks look darker. One problem with reflective coatings on screens is the glare that's produced. Under harsh office lighting, this can result in a mirror-like effect on the screen. Iiyama told us that it has vastly reduced this effect on the X486S-B1 by providing a bright 400cd/m² backlight. We tested the monitor



under fluorescent lighting, and were impressed at the low amount of glare compared to monitors with similar gloss coatings.

There is an ambient light sensor that automatically adjusts the monitor's brightness according to the light level in the room. When put to the test, we found it turned the brightness up a little more than we wanted, or dimmed it a touch more than we were comfortable with. However, the discrepancy was small, and this feature should help to avoid eyestrain. More useful is the infrared sensor that detects motion in front of the screen. If you are away from the monitor for a while, it will go into power-management mode, reducing power consumption.

The X486S-B1 comes with a zero dead pixel policy. This means that if the monitor has just one dead pixel, bright or dark, it will be replaced by the manufacturer. Considering the quality of the monitor and all of the extras that you get with it, the X486S-B1 is excellent value.

Lyndon Oram

SUMMARY

- ✓ Good picture quality
- ✓ Excellent brightness and contrast
- ✗ Auto-brightness feature flawed

19" LCD MONITOR 1,280x1,024 resolution, 700:1 contrast ratio, 2ms response time, D-sub, DVI, USB2 port
PART CODE X486SB1
SUPPLIER www.misco.co.uk
DETAILS www.iiyama.co.uk

CHOOSING A... Projector

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

NATIVE RESOLUTION: 1,024x768

BRIGHTNESS: 1,000 ANSI lumens

CONTRAST RATIO: 500:1

LAMP LIFE: 2,000 hours

CHECK: Weight, throw distance, noise

Recommended minimum in grey

1 Low-cost projectors make two main sacrifices. The brightness, measured in ANSI lumens, will be relatively low and the native resolution will be limited to 1,024x768. Neither need be serious drawbacks if you want to use your projector for presentations or DVDs.

If you want to be ready for High Definition video, though, you'll need a projector with a resolution of at least 1,280x720 and either an HDMI port or HDCP-compliant DVI port.

2 Image quality is obviously important, but this is hard to assess from specifications alone. A high contrast ratio (over 500:1) adds depth to the picture and is one tangible benefit of projectors based on digital light processing (DLP) rather than the older LCD technology. The quality of the optics and colour balance can't be gauged without consulting a review, though.

3 Consider where you'll be using your projector; size and weight are important if the unit will be moved around a lot. You should aim for under 3kg if portability is an issue. Small rooms demand a quiet (sub-33dB) projector and a flexible throw distance – this tells you how close or far away the screen can be. Most projectors can mirror or rotate their image to cope with ceiling mounting or rear projection.

4 Check that the projector can cope with all the signals you might want to feed it. Common video formats are supported by almost all projectors, but high-resolution VGA signals and HDMI aren't. Highly detailed slides will display at their best only on pricier projectors with a 1,280x1,024 native resolution.

5 The brightness of the projector will depend on where you need to use it. Projectors with 1,000 ANSI lumens are fine for darkened rooms, but for meeting rooms, you should get a minimum of 1,300 ANSI lumens. Remember brighter projectors will cost more to run as their bulbs need replacing more often. An ECO mode reduces the brightness of the projector but increases bulb life.

DELL 3400MP

★★★★★

£949 inc VAT and delivery



Dell's 3400MP is tiny, but with 1,500 ANSI lumens it's bright enough for use in a conference room. Colours were even and the brightness and contrast were excellent. It is ideal for use as a business projector. It's well priced, portable and good for presentations. It's also great if you want to take it home to watch movies.



DLP PROJECTOR 1,024x768 native resolution, 1,500 ANSI lumens, 2,100:1 contrast ratio PART CODE 305-3400MP
SUPPLIER Dell 08701 524699
DETAILS www.dell.co.uk
✓ Small and light weight, low lamp running costs FULL REVIEW May 2006

LG 32LC2D

★★★★★

£770 inc VAT

PRICE CUT!



LG's 32LC2D produces beautiful, realistic pictures. Images from our HD movie clips were perfect and the TV displayed every detail flawlessly. Connecting to a PC is easy through D-sub or HDMI and the picture was brilliant. It's excellent value, with a wide range of connections.



32" LCD HD TV, VGA, HDMI, component, three SCART, optical S/PDIF, digital tuner PART CODE 32LC2D
SUPPLIER www.savastore.co.uk DETAILS <http://uk.lge.com>
✓ Superb all-round picture quality ✓ Good computer display FULL REVIEW Nov 2006

PANASONIC PT-AE900E

★★★★★

£1,182 inc VAT



The PT-AE900e is an accomplished home cinema projector. The three-LCD projector produces stunning images. The dynamic iris gives it an excellent contrast ratio of 5,500:1. It has a native resolution of 1,280x720, so it supports 720p High Definition video. This has everything that a budding home cinema user could want at an affordable price.



LCD PROJECTOR 1,280x720 native resolution, 1,100 ANSI lumens, 5,500:1 contrast ratio PART CODE PTAE900E
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk DETAILS www.panasonic.co.uk
✓ Inexpensive, excellent picture quality FULL REVIEW May 2006